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SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: BI-WEEKLY REPORT OCTOBER 13 2006

¶1. The following reports compiled over the last two weeks illustrate the variety of economic, political, and social developments occurring in Ethiopia.

POLITICAL

President Girma Outlines Commitment to Good Governance at Opening of Parliament

¶2. President Girma Wolde-Giorgis addressed the opening of the House of Peoples' Representatives and the House of Federation October 9 to outline the government's commitment to building a democratic system in which good governance prevails. The President admitted that the Ethiopian democratic culture is a nascent stage but said that measures will be taken to overcome the current challenges. As an example, he pointed out that a new press law will be reviewed for consideration and adoption, which should address past issues related to freedom of expression. He also said that the rights and responsibilities of NGOs were not to date clearly defined and a proclamation will be submitted to the House to clarify their role. President Girma listed numerous other matters to be addressed in the upcoming parliamentary session, including a bill to amend the activities of the National Electoral Board, anti-terrorism draft legislation, the establishment of a commodity exchange system, and a law to establish a women's fund.

Government to Adopt New Anti-Terrorism Legislation

¶3. In his opening day speech to Parliament October 9, President Girma Wolde-Giorgis announced that the GOE plans to adopt new anti-terrorism legislation in response to growing national, regional and international threats. The President said the proposed bill is expected to be drafted and ratified by Parliament in the coming months and will focus on coordinating anti-terrorism at the national level and terrorist finance. This anti-terrorism bill will be the first of its kind for Ethiopia and has been developed with USG assistance.

Eight People Killed in Religious Disturbances

¶4. Eight people were killed and over 100 houses and two churches were burned in clashes between Muslims and Orthodox Christians in Dembi, Oromiya region. The conflict began on September 26, the eve of the Ethiopian Orthodox holiday of Meskel, during which Christians light a traditional holiday bonfire. Local Muslims complained that the resulting smoke was seeping into the nearby mosque and asked the Christians to extinguish the fire. The Christians refused and in an ensuing argument, a Christian man was hit by a rock allegedly thrown by a Muslim. Angered by the act, his son retrieved an automatic weapon and opened fire on Muslims, killing four and wounding five. The following day at the burial ceremony, Muslim demonstrators demanded that the shooter be put to death, to which police responded that the suspect had been apprehended and just would take its course. Dissatisfied,

the Muslim demonstrators went on a rampage and burned over 100 huts and two churches. The violence continued until October 4, at the end of which an additional four people had been killed and 1,500 displaced. Police arrested over 20 suspects involved in the clash. Police are currently investigating and charges are expected to be presented by October 20. According to police reports, most those detained are Muslims belonging to the conservative Quaricha sect. Elders and religious leaders are working to reconcile the two communities.

Preparations for Local Elections

¶15. According to the private bi-weekly newspaper "Reporter," the National Electoral Board (NEB) said that preparations are underway to conduct urban zonal, woreda (district), and kebele elections this year. Acting Registrar of the NEB Mekonnen Wondimu reported that printing documents for the elections, budget allocation, collecting detailed data regarding voting centers, and other related work are moving forward. As the current NEB board's mandate expires November 9, Mekonnen said that election preparations would start immediately after a new board is named.

Ethiopian Federal Police Arrest 81 ONC Members

¶16. On August 23 and 24, Ethiopian federal police arrested 81 opposition Oromo National Congress (ONC) party members in the village of Tikur Inchini, in the Ambo zone of the Oromiya region. The arrests were the result of series of disturbances since May 2005 allegedly organized by ONC members. The reported disturbances included numerous attacks on ruling party members or those suspected of being associated with the government, as well as a number of public

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disturbances and acts of vandalism intended to incite unrest. Following their arrest, the 81 detainees were charged with attempting to overthrow the local government, as well as treason. Their trial was anticipated to begin in early October. Under Ethiopian law, individuals charged with treason typically not granted bail, however, by October 11 the majority of the detainees had been released on bail of 6,000 birr/person. Those that remain in detention are attempting to raise the necessary funds. Upon release the detainees were not given instructions on future court appearances or information on the status of their case. Though the prosecution may continue the case at a later date, this is not an unheard of police procedure -- arrest, charge, let out on bail, and allow case to drop -- as a possible means of intimidation.

Charge Celebrates FGM-Free Zone in Southern Ethiopia

¶17. Charge attended the third annual Celebration of Whole Body and Healthy Life and Freedom from Female Genital Excision October 8 in the Kembatta-Tembaro zone in Southern Ethiopia. The event celebrated the end of female genital mutilation in the Kembatta Tembaro zone and reaffirmed the community's commitment to continue to combat harmful traditional practices. Charge toured a mother-child health center, a self-help center, and a new women's business center designed to strengthen development capacity. The visit culminated in a moving rally in which thousands of community elders, men, women, and children honored the rebirth of positive traditions including arts and dance. KMG has been the recipient of two grants through the Ambassador's Democracy and Human Rights Fund, receiving a total of over \$15,000 in 2002 and 2004. Since January 2004, the organization's eight offices in Kembatta-Tembaro zone have reported no known incidents of the centuries-old practice of genital excision, which was nearly universal when KMG opened.

DEVELOPMENT

USAID Obligates Over \$258 Million in FY2006

¶ 8. USAID obligated over \$258 million in program funds during FY2006, including over \$100 in food aid. By far the largest amount of bi-lateral aid was in the health sector, including HIV/AIDS. USAID Ethiopia notified \$130 million, which includes PEPFAR and a small amount of food aid that may increase during the year, in the FY2007 Congressional Budget Notification. USAID is working with other USG agencies at post on the FY2008 budget in line with the operational plan process.

Gambella Conflict Resolution Project Hold "Peace Concert"

¶ 9. USAID's mission director visited Gambella and reported that USAID funded NGO PACT has been effective in bringing together different ethnic groups for its conflict prevention project. For the first time in many years, elders of local groups are sitting down together to solve ethnically related problems and issues, and are developing strategies to stop them from developing in the future. PACT arranged a "Peace Concert" October 6 which drew upwards of 20,000 people from different ethnic groups in the area.

EU President Barroso Visits Addis

¶ 10. EU President Jose Manual Barroso held talks with Prime Minister Meles October 2. He told journalists the commission would provide 155 million euro for the implementation of Ethiopia's road sector development program. Barroso said the commission has been providing significant support for development activities in Ethiopia. Describing the development cooperation between the commission and Ethiopia as exemplary, Barroso indicated that Ethiopia takes the lion share of the European Development Fund's development aid in Africa. Barroso said his talks with Meles were open and positive.

PEPFAR

National Antiretroviral Treatment Program Surpasses 50,000 Mark

¶ 11. The PEPFAR-supported National Antiretroviral Treatment (ART) program has resulted in the treatment of over 50,000 people. Of these, 39,984 people are still currently on ART at 159 health facilities around Ethiopia. Overall, close to 50 percent are women and four percent children. To date, only 0.13 percent have required second line drugs indicating low levels of treatment failures to first line drugs. This is also supported by preliminary results from a threshold antiretroviral drug resistance survey that detected no

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resistance virus.

REFUGEES

Influx of Somali Asylum Seekers Into Ethiopia

¶ 12. UNHRC reported an influx in Somali asylum seekers into Ethiopia. As of October 6, there were 1,350 families (approximately 3000-5000 individuals) of possible refugees located at five locations in the Bare District along the Somali border. According to the initial assessment done by UNHCR staff, the asylum seekers are fleeing inter-clan conflict and fear of future conflict between the Ethiopian army and the Union of Islamic Courts.

Refugee Coordinator Holds Successful Donor's Coordination Group Meeting

¶ 13. The Refugee Coordinator's office held its second Donor's Coordination Group Meeting October 3 with a focus on Somalia.

Representatives from the GOE, five foreign missions, UNHCR, UNOCHA, the African Union, and two NGOs attended. UNHCR, UNOCHA, GOE's Agency for Refugee and Returnee Affairs, and IRC gave presentations on the current situation in Ethiopia and Somalia as well as contingency planning options for a possible future influx in refugees.

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